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A Coup in Greece; A Bit of Blackmail

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AS IT TURNED out, the top-secret meeting in Washington in mid-February was like the lament of a Greek chorus for the tragedy to come. Around the table were military, intelligence, State—all the powers dealing with the Greek problem.

CIA reports had left no doubt that a military coup was in the making with the knowledge if not the sanction of King Constantine. It could hardly have been a secret. Since 1947 the Greek army and the American military aid group in Athens, numbering several hundred, have worked as part of the same team. The team has spent something under \$2 billion on the guns, planes, tanks and ships of the Greek forces.

The solemn question was whether by some subtle political intervention the coup could be prevented. Could parliamentary government be saved even though George Papandreou and his son, Andreas, were driven from the political scene? This last was the goal of the extreme right among the military. The elder Papandreou had become something of a folk hero—he had obtained the only outright majority in the history of Greek elections in modern times. To throw him out would be to throw out the symbol of the democratic process. A "plot" had been worked up, believed largely the fabrication of the military, and Andreas was under investigation for possible conspiracy to commit treason.

THE CONSENSUS around the table, after some hand-wringing with agonized appraisals of the consequences, was that no course of action was feasible. As one of the senior civilians present recalls it, Walt Rostow, the President's adviser on national security affairs, closed the meeting with these words: I hope you understand, gentlemen, that what we have concluded here, or rather have failed to conclude, makes the future course of events in Greece inevitable.

Those events have now run their course and Greece is under a Fascist-type dictatorship like that in Italy in the '20s and '30s. The knock on the door, the stern dicta on dress and religion, thousands of arrests of political figures ranging from left to right, all the apparatus of fear and intimidation—this is the grim shadow that has fallen over an important piece of what is so often glibly called "the free world."

In this is a supreme irony. For Greece had successfully, with the help of massive and invaluable American aid, put down a Communist-led rebellion and seemed to have achieved stability with freedom despite quarrelsome political factions and palace intrigues.

What happened in Athens is described by those with intimate knowledge as a coup within a coup. The colonels took over with the sanction of one right-wing general. It is widely agreed that, if it had not been for the coup, the elections late this month would have returned Papandreou as Premier.

So far the public reaction from Washington has been little more than an unhappy squeak. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, returning from a NATO meeting in Paris, said he told the Greek defense minister that the United States would stand aloof until constitutional government was restored.

The State Department line is that any critical statement might precipitate a civil war. How this could happen in view of the tight clamp of the military with all the weapons of mass destruction in their hands is hard to see.

One of the few protests came from Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), who has a background both in diplomacy and politics. At the very worst, he said, a government controlled by Papandreou might have withdrawn Greece from NATO and put the country in a neutral position between East and West. While this would be dismaying, if a duly elected government so decided, he went on, it should take place.

THE ATTEMPT to smear Andreas Papandreou as a Communist goes back a long way, joined by certain American commentators. Objective observers who knew him well in this country and for many years in Greece call this nonsense, although they readily agree he was inept in the savage infighting of Greek politics. His economic views are those of the American New Deal. Serving in his father's cabinet he proposed basic reforms, including taxing the very rich.

The effect is of a scratched record being played over once again. Col. Nikolas Makarezos, Minister of Coordination, in a recent interview said the United States should hurry up and send more military aid to keep Greece from communism—two American ships with aid have been held up. From another junta source came the suggestion that if Andreas Papandreou's friends wanted to save him from execution they had better see that this aid came quickly. That is not so polite a bit of blackmail.